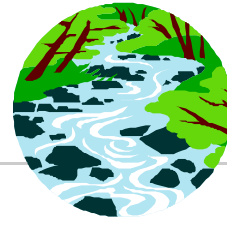


September, 2001

# Running Waters

Newsletter of the



Central Wisconsin Basin Partnership

Volume 3, Issue 3

## River Basins in the spotlight - Mill Creek

Submitted by Jason Folstad

Mill Creek is a 47-mile tributary of the Wisconsin River and is currently being worked on by the DNR, Wood & Portage County Land Conservation Departments, and watershed stakeholders and landowners. The stream originates in the City of Marshfield and has minimal streamflow in its upper reaches. The Marshfield WWTP discharges to the headwaters of Mill Creek and under normal flow, contributes up to 96% of the streamflow at the point of discharge. Throughout Mill Creek there are five municipal wastewater treatment plants that discharge effluent to the watershed. These sources are concentrated in the upper portion of the watershed. The city of Marshfield, town of Blenker - Sherry, and villages of Junction City, Hewitt and Milladore discharge to Mill Creek directly, or to its tributaries.

There are approximately 19,140 people that live in the Mill Creek watershed and it is predicted to grow by approximately 2 percent in the next 15 years. Looking back through time at the pre-settlement landscape this watershed consisted mainly of woodlands and was about 15 percent wetlands. The current day land use shows the percentage of wetlands actually increased. Historically, a number of the farms were unable to make a living in this watershed due to the extremely high water table and poor crop production. As farms were abandoned farmland was left vacant and the fields slowly converted into low land marshes and wetlands. Currently agriculture makes up most of the land use in this watershed

Mill Creek has been an environmental concern on a wide variety of issues. Some of those impacts are stormwater run-off, sedimentation, barnyard and cropland run-off, flashy streamflow, channel ditching, oxygen depletion, streambank erosion, ammonia toxicity, and nutrient enrichment. With such a diverse set of problems, agencies from the county level all the way up the federal level are

getting involved with Mill Creek. The Portage County Animal Wastewater Pollution Control Plan ranked the Mill Creek Watershed as third in priority among the 12 watersheds in Portage county for Nonpoint source (NPS) control of animal waste. The DNR conducted a Biotic index sampling, which indicates poor to very poor water quality at selected locations along Mill Creek. The upper 14 miles of the stream is listed in NR 104 as a Limited Aquatic Life variance stream and the lower 33 miles is classified as Fish and Aquatic life waters. The Fish and Aquatic Life reach of Mill Creek is also listed as an impaired waterbody by the Wisconsin DNR for low dissolved oxygen, which requires the DNR to develop a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) study for the stream.

The TMDL study that is currently being done by the DNR on Mill Creek is headed by Water Quality Biologist, Ken Schreiber from the Eau Claire regional office. The TMDL study not only looks at current fish and insect populations in the stream but also incorporates physical data along with water chemistry information. All the samples and data that are collected come from key locations throughout the entire stream length. Some of the tests being conducted are dissolved oxygen levels, phosphate levels, nitrate levels, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and suspended sediment levels. All that data and more will be compiled and analyzed this winter. The study will use a water quality model to help understand the causes and extent of dissolved oxygen problems in the stream. The DNR is currently seeking funds to contract with the U.S. Geological Survey to install continuous streamflow monitoring stations in the stream next year. This information will then be used by stakeholders and regulators to develop strategies that will improve the overall quality of the Mill Creek watershed.

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### Articles of Special Interest

- *River Basin Spotlight*

## Yellow River Working Group Report

Submitted by Rebecca Power

What's going on in central Wisconsin's Yellow River? Partnership projects with private landowners continue to move forward with technical assistance having been provided to 22 landowners, including five projects designed to improve wildlife habitat on 50 acres. Most of the projects are savanna restorations that benefit white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, nesting waterfowl, and the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly.

Several groups have expressed their support of the project, including The River Alliance of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Sierra Club's John Muir Chapter (Wisconsin's Sierra Club chapter), and the Friends of Necedah National Wildlife Refuge.

Another group (the Yellow River Property Owners Association), which is primarily concerned with private property rights, has expressed opposition to the project. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with these landowners to address their concerns and will be meeting with them in the next few weeks.

Pending Regional and Washington approval of the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan, which should happen this fall, the Service hopes to be able to provide additional conservation services to landowners.

If you would like more information about the Yellow River or Yellow River conservation opportunities, please contact Necedah National Wildlife Refuge at 608-565-2551.



### Buena Vista Partnership's Alternative Cattle Watering Project

Submitted by Jason Folstad

The Buena Vista partnership is currently working on a project to provide alternate sources of water to help producers remove cattle from the Buena Vista ditches. This project is a joint effort between the Wisconsin DNR, Portage County LCD, UW-Extension and Golden Sands RC&D. This project will cost share the expenses of removing fences and restoring ditch bank watering holes and supplying upland watering tanks and ponds as alternative watering sources. The Buena Vista partnership encourages grazing on the Buena Vista. Tom Jerow with the DNR stated that "grazing helps maintain and increase grassland habitat, which is one of the DNR's goals for this area of the Fourmile Creek Watershed." Jerow explained that with the funding that Golden Sands RC&D received that is meant to help supply cattle with an alternative watering source, other than the near by ditches. The question was asked why were the cattle owners of the Buena Vista area chosen for the project? They were chosen due to funding being made available to help improve the overall water quality of Fourmile Watershed. This has been a high priority for the Buena Vista partnership for a number of years. The partnership has made several efforts to receive funding to decrease sedimentation into the ditches, but were denied. When funding became available through Golden Sands RC&D this was the perfect opportunity to be able to get the Alternative Cattle Watering Project started. In summary Jerow stated that the DNR supports cattle ranching in the Buena Vista Area for the benefits it has on Grassland Ecosystems and this program, which the Portage County LCD will be implementing, is strictly voluntary.

### Cattle Grazing and Prairie Chicken Habitat on the Buena Vista

Submitted by Jim Keir

Is grazing important on the Buena Vista Marsh for maintaining prairie chicken habitat? The short and simple answer is yes. Grazing and prairie chicken management go hand in hand. Without some grazing, the grassland biomass would become so thick that the birds couldn't use it. In fact, moving through such grass would be particularly difficult for the prairie chicken. Also, without grazing woody vegetation would quickly encroach on many sites and reduce the value of the grassland habitat. Today private pastureland is an essential part of the grassland ecosystem on the Buena Vista Marsh.

*What is being done to help restore the prairie chicken back into its native habitat in Wisconsin?*

Conservationists and biologists are working to keep this native bird from completely disappearing. The study of prairie chickens at the Buena Vista Marsh began in 1935 with the work of Fred and Fran Hamerstrom. Their "Guide to Prairie Chicken Management" was published in 1957. They recommended acquiring land in the area in an "ecological scatter pattern." This scattered block pattern integrated grasslands into the farming activities, providing nest-brood cover and wide open spaces (two of the weakest links in habitat necessary for prairie chickens). This scattered pattern took advantage of existing private lands that also provided wide horizons and additional habitat needs. Today, over 15,000 acres in Adams, Portage, and Wood counties, have been acquired for prairie chicken management, thanks in large part to the people and organizations who stepped forward to help preserve the last fading voice of "the prairie wilderness."

## Invasive Plants in Wisconsin

From the WDNR's Endangered Resources Webpage

### *Why are some plants so invasive?*

As plants have evolved and moved around over the millennia, they have adapted to the community of other plants and animals that also existed in their habitat. Most plants have numerous insects or other animals that feed on them and various disease organisms that keep them from overpopulating their native homeland. Yet when these plants are moved to a new continent or region without these predators and diseases, they are given the opportunity to spread unchecked. In addition, some plants are pioneers, capitalizing on disturbed sites by rapidly reproducing and seeding in to bare soil. Fortunately, not all non-native plants are invasive and spread freely into natural areas, agricultural fields, wetlands, forests, and prairies. Some, such as honeysuckle and common buckthorn, have been a problem for a number of years and are now so abundant that most urban parks in the Milwaukee area have few other plants beneath their branches. These European shrubs leaf out early and cast a dense shade, virtually eliminating spring wildflowers, native shrubs, and even tree seedlings. Other species, such as garlic mustard, are fairly recent invaders, very rapidly colonizing the forest floor in the last 10 years. Some plants have shown to be very weedy further east, south or west, yet have not yet become a problem here. Our cold winter temperatures or other environmental conditions limit the spread of some species not adapted to our area. But there are others that are very likely to become a problem here in the future.

### *Can these plants be eliminated?*

Plants like common buckthorn and garlic mustard are already so abundant in the landscape that it is unlikely they ever will be eliminated. Yet with early and effective control measures we may be able to reduce their abundance and allow native plants to thrive once more. Other weeds, such as black swallow-wort, (a vining milkweed) have only become established in a few sites and we may still be able to contain them. Careful regular monitoring for new weed infestations can detect new outbreaks.

### *What measures are used to control these weeds?*

Many of the herbaceous weeds and shallow-rooted shrubs can be hand-pulled. Take care to wear gloves as some of the plants contain toxic compounds. Prescribed burning controls many invaders in prairies and other grasslands. Carefully timed mowing can work for some weeds. For many trees, shrubs, vines and larger perennials, the most effective way to kill the plant is cutting it and applying the proper herbicide to the cut stump. Leaves must be sprayed on some herbs and grasses. Specific control methods are gradually being developed for each species as landowners and managers experiment with different techniques. For most weeds, it is important to identify and control new infestations right away, and to prevent seed from being distributed.

*Photo of Japanese honeysuckle provided courtesy of Forestry Images website*



## Highlights from our last Partnership meeting

Submitted by John DuPlissis

The Central Wisconsin Partnership convened at the Wausau School Forest on July 18<sup>th</sup>. The idea of creating an advisory committee that would help out the partnership by filling a leadership role has been talked about in the past but action was never taken. After a detailed discussion and some compromise Co-chair were created. It was agreed that one of the co-chairs would always be a DNR Basin Team Leader. Tom Jerow, Basin Water Team Leader, volunteered to serve as a co-chair. The other co-chair position was filled by George Bartels a retired electrician and a member of the Conservation Congress. The partnership agreed that Bartels and Jerow would work together to bring back to the partnership a model for an executive committee for action at our next meeting. The first action taken by the co-chair was to send a letter of concern on behalf of the Partnership to the DOT for the Highway 10-bypass crossing the Plover River.

The partnership is in the process of evaluating four new projects to be taken up by the partnership. The Partnership is currently seeking project champions. The proposed new projects include:

- Help to improve the overall water quality on Mill Creek.
- Reduce the break up of large parcels of land in Adams County.
- Preventing and reducing the spread of exotics in central Wisconsin.
- Maintaining the water quality and quantity of the Little Plover River.

## Upcoming Events

### WISCONSIN WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION'S

#### ANNUAL MEETING

Stoney Creek Inn, Wausau

October 5th through the 7th, 2001

for more information contact Nancy Bozek at:

P.O. Box 285

Stevens Point, WI 54481

(715) 346-4798

### CENTRAL WISCONSIN BASIN PARTNERSHIP

Marshfield Wastewater Facility

Wednesday, October 17th, 2001

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Contact John DuPlissis for more information

### 21<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL NORTH AMERICAN LAKE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM

Monona Terrace Community and Conservation Center, Madison

November 7th through the 9th, 2001

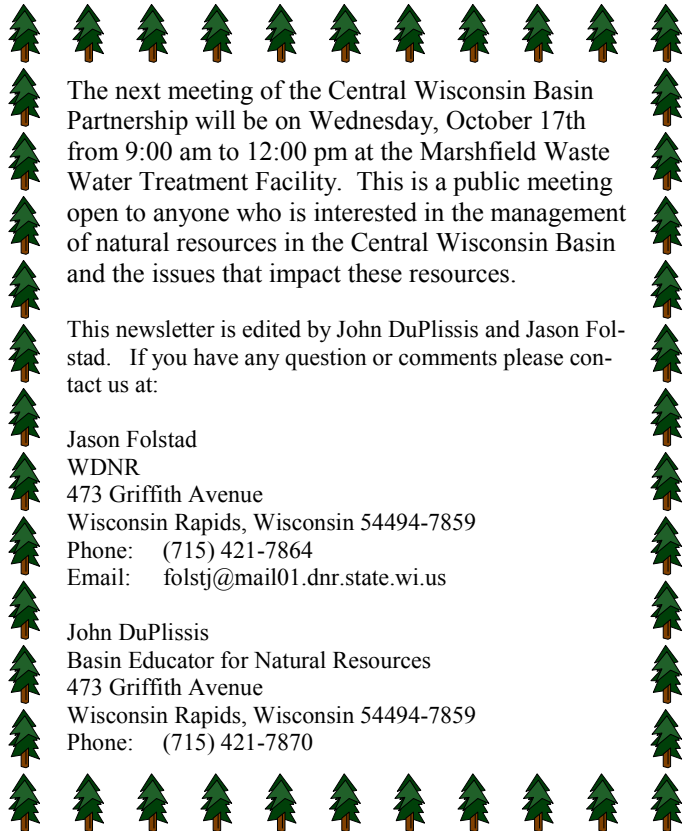
Complete symposium information is available at the North American Lake Management Society website, [www.nalms.org](http://www.nalms.org).

# Central Wisconsin Basin Partnership

*Working Together for Conservation*

473 Griffith Avenue  
Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin 54494-7859

**The purpose of the Central Wisconsin Basin Partnership is to bring diverse people and resources together to provide increased awareness of regionally important natural resource issues. The partnership facilitates and implements projects that promote ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable natural resource management.**



The next meeting of the Central Wisconsin Basin Partnership will be on Wednesday, October 17th from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Marshfield Waste Water Treatment Facility. This is a public meeting open to anyone who is interested in the management of natural resources in the Central Wisconsin Basin and the issues that impact these resources.

This newsletter is edited by John DuPlissis and Jason Folstad. If you have any question or comments please contact us at:

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